

How can we radically broaden our thinking?

The World and the Earth

DAVID VAN REYBROUCK

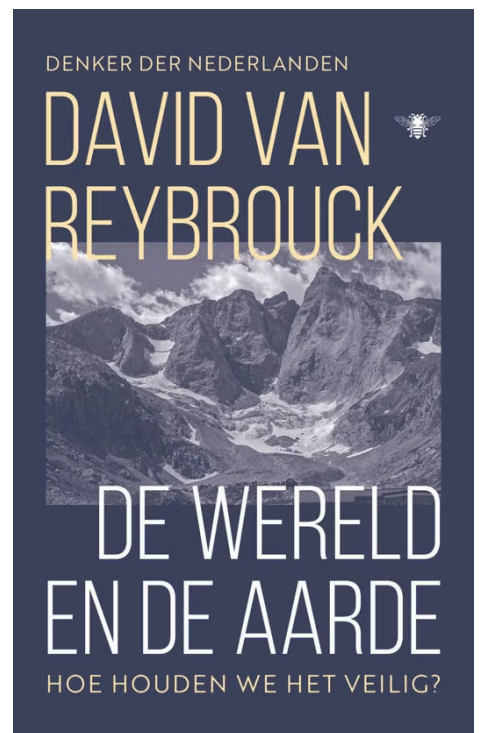
In April 2025, David Van Reybrouck was named Philosopher Laureate for the Netherlands and Flanders (the new title for what was formerly known as the Nation's Philosopher). This honorary title is awarded every two years to a renowned philosopher, thinker, or public intellectual to enrich societal debate in the Netherlands and Flanders through essays, opinion pieces, lectures, or interviews. From April 2025 to April 2027, Van Reybrouck will focus his efforts in the Netherlands and Flanders on the theme of 'vérdennen', a Dutch neologism created to emphasise the importance of thinking afar. In his essay 'The World and the Earth' he explains what he means by this:

"In Dutch, we have the words 'verspringen' and 'vérspringen' (to jump and to leap far), but curiously only 'verdenken' (to suspect) and not 'vérdennen', even though the latter is precisely what we need. 'Vérdennen' means looking at the present from the perspective of the distant future and the distant past. Where do we come from, and where do we want to go? It also means 'vérdennen' in space: beyond geographical borders or social bubbles. Thinking is more than philosophy, and philosophy is more than Western philosophy."

To face the unpredictability of our times, we need all the wisdom that humanity has ever produced, including non-Western philosophies, but also spiritual, literary, and artistic traditions, alongside scientific, collective and practical forms of thought. It even seems that we can learn from our environment: many technological innovations are already inspired by nature's intelligence."

The greatest security issue of our time is not the world with its internal conflicts, but the Earth, which is becoming increasingly disrupted. The planet is lashing out more fiercely against the human world. The world has destabilised the physical Earth, and now the Earth is destabilising the world.

Modern diplomacy, that centuries-old dialogue between nations, must urgently reinvent itself. What might that look like? In 'The World and the Earth', David Van Reybrouck offers a passionate and boundary-pushing proposal to radically broaden our thinking



AUTHOR



David Van Reybrouck (b. 1971) is an archaeologist, a philosopher and a writer. His digging and thinking result in literary nonfiction, theatre plays, poetry and prose. After his award-winning debut, Van Reybrouck received national and international praise and prizes for his epic history of Congo, as well as for his urgent call for democratic reform. In 2016 he wrote the official Dutch Book Week essay. Listen to David Van Reybrouck on 'Kopje Koffie' ('Cup of Coffee'), a podcast produced by The Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch Foundation for Literature, in cooperation with Flanders Literature and the General Representation of the Government of Flanders. Photo © Lenny Oosterwijk

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